

## Mt. Philo State Park – long-range management plan development

Email comments received in response to June 14, 2016 Recreation Workshop

### EMAIL 1

- Mt Philo's most predominant change over time has been the dramatic increase in use. Gone are the days when one could essentially walk the trails alone. Year-round, the parking lot has many cars and is often full at peak walking hours. On weekends, the parked cars extend half-way down State Park Road. It is not pleasurable to walk in such an over-crowded place. When we see those many cars, we turn around and leave. Disappointing. But how to manage large, large numbers of people is an anathema to me. Personally, I don't want to be turned away from using the park, and don't think people should be. I believe the park has had several large bumps in popularity after an article in Outside magazine citing it as one of the 10 best things to do in Vt, and also due to social media/Trip Advisor, etc. And I am glad the people are out, getting fresh air and exercise, in a place that is safe from car traffic. I would hope that over time, things will settle a bit and the numbers will sort themselves out. I do however, think there should be additional parking, perhaps on the west side adjacent to the current parking lot. And I would like to see the poison parsnip on the edge of the parking lot be disposed of/brush-hogged/eradicated.
- The second issue of how to maintain the park as the wonderfully dog-friendly place, involves many aspects of human-canine interactions. The issues include: on-leash or off-leash?, time of day for on-leash/off-leash?, perhaps one designated "non-dog trail" for humans who don't like dogs. I believe strongly that most issues can be minimized when dogs are off-leash. Dogs left to their own communication skills will sort things out themselves. Dynamics change when dogs are on-leash. They lack freedom to interact in a canine fashion. And they "feel" their owners' emotions...ie, if an owner is anxious, the dog picks up on it, and the dog then becomes anxious. Further, many of the worst dog situations occur when one dog is on-leash, and the other off-leash. The doggie dynamics are skewed, unequal and unfair. I have observed the worst dog/human interactions in that sort of a situation.

I would prefer designated times to allow dogs to be off-leash and on-leash. I think the current system of before 10 am off-leash and after 10 am on-leash is a good one. What I consistently observe are people failing to obey park rules and walking dogs off-leash during official park hours. Then trouble ensues. People ignoring rules makes everyone pay a penalty. Please, let's make a concerted effort to get park users to follow the rules, rather than penalizing responsible dog-walkers/owners! I would further wager that most people are responsible for their dogs, and it is a rare few that are difficult.

I applaud the effort to make plans & manage issues to preserve our Mt Philo treasure. I hope that this stewardship effort will allow everyone to benefit.

## EMAIL 2

- There has been an ongoing problem with lack of parking at the entrance. All too often, cars park along Mt. Philo Road and State Park Road during peak times. It seems that there is room to the north and possibly to the South of the current parking lot to add spaces.
- Also, I would like to suggest that a "local attractions" kiosk or information booth that the Dept of Tourism often provides at certain places be added near the trailhead in the parking lot. I know there is one at the mountaintop parking lot, but one below would be a great way to promote local businesses and attractions.

## EMAIL 3

- I was reminded today, while on Mt Philo, of something I should have mentioned at the meeting. I think there should be clearer signs at the upper parking lot showing visitors where the main viewpoint is. I often see (as I saw today) first-time visitors get out of their car in the upper parking lot, go to the picnic table that's at the clearing right there (opposite the rangers' house), and leave it at that, having no idea that there's anything else up there. The folks today at least asked a ranger if there were other viewpoints. But if you were to go strictly by the signs up there now, you'd think there were just restrooms and the picnic shelter beyond the parking lot. This is a great strategy for reducing the number of folks going all the way to the viewpoint, but I don't think that's the intent!

## EMAIL 4

- The local VAST club, Shelburne, Charlotte Area Travelers (SCAT) is responsible for the maintenance of VAST Corridor trail 7 which travels through the length of the park, as well as the short feeder trail that travels along the road leading to the top of Mt. Philo. Part of this maintenance includes the installation of snowmobile trail signs along the trail system. There seems to be an ongoing problem with sign vandalism and theft related specifically to the snowmobile trail signs installed by the club. This is a major problem for all of the user groups within the park, and by Vermont Statute is against the law. On numerous occasions the club has gone and reinstalled signs a second, third and fourth time during the snowmobile season only to have them vandalized and removed each time. This creates confusion for snowmobilers who are not familiar with the area, which causes them to ride onto other trails within the park, where they are not supposed to be operating, in search of the correct trail. This results in user conflicts between motorized and non-motorized uses, and creates a safety issue for recreationalist in the park.
- We would like to communicate and work closely/cooperatively with other user groups who utilize the trails in the park in order to address this issue and effectively maintain the trail system there. I am hoping that a dialogue can be started about this issue at the meeting so that we can alleviate some of the user conflicts that take place as a result of the vandalized/missing

signs. We can all work together towards a common goal even though we each may seek different forms of recreation within the state park at Mt. Philo.

#### EMAIL 5

- The parks growth in use is unsustainable with current facilities. I am sure you have the numbers but anecdotally we can say that the parking lot is full or overflowing every fair weather weekend whether the park is open or not. Weekday fair weather days the lot is full most of the day but especially after work.
- Present on site management has been superb given the above situation of over attendance/lack of facilities. Trails are managed with water bars and maintained but with only one trail from the base it is vastly overused/abused.
- Spread the current attendance load out over the mountain. The northern portion of land donated several years ago, remains totally unused by most. There seems to be space to build a more extensive trail system. We have found numerous "unofficial" trails and use them extensively to find peace among the throngs.
- Dogs - We have had our fair share of unpleasant human/dog interactions. And yes I mean unpleasant humans and dogs, which often go hand in paw 😊. Enforcement and abidance to existing leash requirements has improved. Dog potties are essential. Perhaps in expanding the trail network or usable space, certain areas may be dog friendly and others human only friendly. The segregated time of early am "no leash required" is helpful but does concentrate the use to dogs during that time. The park must remain dog friendly but may need more definition of what, where and when that is.
- The park is very event friendly and is a great revenue stream to support potential infrastructure. My guess is that a fairly small portion of the revenue generated sees its way back to the park. That must be changed. Money needs to follow the metrics

#### EMAIL 6

- At some point in time it's reasonable to conclude that some form of recreational trail will be added to the park on this new land.
- My reason for writing is to suggest that a "primitive" trail be planned, sooner rather than later, on the North side of park and that it be an all-volunteer project at no cost to the park. Designating it primitive, and what that means, would perhaps discourage the hoards that presently walk their dogs and kids to the top of Mt. Philo. Making it primitive would: make it a small wandering path with no signage; provide that no live trees be cut during construction; mean no power tools used; mean no trail improvements beyond moving dead wood and brush; mean no dogs on or off leash; mean no group larger than 5 persons; mean all children under 18 accompanied by adults; mean trail destination is not the top
- Entrances at both ends would be kept not obvious and have signs stating rules for a primitive trail. (Signs would be furnished by volunteers after park approval). Map designation could simply be a mention and "see park ranger" especially for the campers. I see the trail starting near the North end of the parking lot and ending near the North view spot.
- All work done including flagging, after park approval, and maintenance throughout hiking season for blow-downs etc. by volunteers.

## EMAIL 7

- regulation also states "No animals will be allowed in certain day-use areas including parking lots, beaches, pools, picnic areas and playgrounds." Wouldn't you agree that the top of Mt. Philo, where the PICNIC TABLES are located would be considered to be a picnic area? Therefore, dogs are specifically not allowed there.
- Second, since you state that you have no jurisdiction during non-operating hours, shouldn't the signs stating that dogs should be leashed be removed during the closed season, and every night when the park closes during the open season?
- The rule refers to designated camping areas. Does this mean dogs are only allowed at the lean-to areas? Or does it somehow include the entire State Park, only a small percentage of the park is "Designated Camping Area", or can one camp anywhere?
- We recommend following the above referenced rule, or operating the park similar to Kingsland Bay, not allowing dogs at all during operating hours.
- Also, the signs stating all dogs must be on leash is up 24/7. Are you allowing dog owners to ignore this sign simply because it's before operating hours? Our attorney thinks the sign gives us a great amount of ammunition if we pursue this case.
- If during non-operating hours it's a free-for-all for dog owners, we will act appropriately to loose dogs that come in our vicinity.
- I know it's sacrilege, but we believe humans have more rights than dogs, and we will take measures to defend ourselves. Especially for dog owners that blatantly ignore the clearly visible signs.
- We know through discussions with the Charlotte Dog Officer that there are many incidents with dogs at Mt. Philo. Someone in a position of authority needs to expand and enforce the rules before a serious injury occurs.
- Last, you really need to get the rangers to enforce the rules.